THE UNIVERSAL TROPHY IS ARTHRITIS

most of my life i competed in athletics, from softball leagues on through high school and college into years of weightlifting, faculty basketball, backyard boxing, and barroom armwrestling. even when i cut it all back to jogging, there were always voices inside or out telling me i ought to be going a little farther or a little faster. now i try to keep afloat on the ocean about twenty minutes a couple of times a week. the only challenge is trying not to drown. if any of my kids wants to compete at anything, that's fine. and they can be sure they won't be competing with me. i just hope they learn sooner than i did that the least important way of proving yourself is athletic.

A DEAR GERALD NOTE

i awake today to a note from my wife: "i'll be taking the kids to my mother's after work today to celebrate valentine's day."

it is february 17. valentine's day was 3 days ago. we've been celebrating valentine's day for about ten days. i tried to keep up with the celebration, but i dropped out about february 13.

today, february 17, is not valentine's day, but it is my birthday.

no matter. my wife will remember within a week and rush me something i like from the liquor store. and, in the meantime, not all the money in the world could purchase a gift as exquisite as this finely nurtured hurt.